

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 6295

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, PINS, KS

SUBJ: LABOR TROUBLES IN ULSAN AND MASAN

1. A VIOLENT MAJOR STRIKE HAS HIT THE HYUNDAI SHIP-BUILDING AND HEAVY INDUSTRY COMPANY IN ULSAN, SEPT. 19-20. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, SOME 2,500 WORKERS BROKE WINDOWS, DESTROYED CARS, AND MACHINERY, INVADED THE HOMES OF MANAGERS TO STEAL OR DESTROY THEIR PROPERTY, AND ATTACKED COMPANY CHAIRMAN CHONG CHU-YONG. ALTHOUGH 47 FOREIGN MANAGERS AND TECHNICALIAIAN INCLUDING US CITIZENS LIVE IN YARD, NONE WERE INJURED DURING EVENTS.

2. SOME 1200 RIOT POLICEMENT WERE BROUGHT INTO THE SHIPYARD TO END THE DAY AND HALF PROTESTS AND RIOTING. ACCORDING TO ONE NEWSPAPER MAN ANTI-ROK AND ANTI-COMPANY SLOGANS WERE PAINTED ON COMPANY BUILDINGS. SOME 120 WORKERS ARE NOW DETAINED BY POLICE.

3. OFFICE OF LABOR AFFAIRS (OLA) SOURCES HAVE INFORMED EMBASSY THAT STRIKE NOW UNDER CONTROL AND THAT THROUGH COMBINED EFFORTS OF OLA OFFICIALS
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AND METAL WORKERS' UNION LEADERS NEGOTIATIONS FOR

SETTLEMENT ARE RESUMING. THE SHIPYARD WHICH BUILDS SUPERTANKERS AND IS THE BIGGEST SUCH FACILITY IN KOREA, EMPLOYING 18,000 WORKERS AND EMPLOYEES, HAS TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED OPERATIONS PENDING NEGOTIATIONS AND INVESTIGATION OF INCIDENT.

4. IN OTHER LABOR DEVELOPMENTS SOME 1,500-2,000 WORKERS STRUCK AND DEMONSTRATED IN MASAN FREE-ZONE AREA BECAUSE SOME 30 JAPANESE AND JAPANESE-KOREAN JOINT VENTURE FIRMS HAD TO SHUT DOWN FOR LACK OF FUNDS OR CREDITS. COMPANIES AFFECTED ARE MOSTLY SMALL ELECTRONICS FIRMS, BUT ALSO ONE LARGE FROZEN FISH PACKAGING PLANT.

5. ACCORDING TO OLA OFFICIALS, CAUSE OF RIOT WAS COMPANY'S UNILATERAL EFFORT TO CHANGE EMPLOYMENT STATUS, WAGE PAY SYSTEMS, TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS TO WORKERS' DETRIMENT.

COMMENT: ULSAN STRIKE IS LARGEST AND MOST VIOLENT SINCE 1972 SHIPYARD AND PORT STRIKES IN PUSAN. GOVT OFFICIALS, UNION LEADERS AND EMPLOYERS ARE EXPRESSING INCREASING CONCERN OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF WIDENING LABOR UNREST BECAUSE OF PRESENT INFLATIONARY SITUATION, INCREASING UNEMPLOYMENT AND DETERIORATING LABOR CONDITIONS.
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